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AUTHOR Zhang, Shu Ya; Carrasquillo, Angela L.
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ABSTRACT

This document reviews the literature on subjects relating to Chinese-American students. The paper presents information under six major headings: (1) "Asian Immigrants in the United States: Demographic Data"; (2) "Economic and Educational Background of Asian Immigrants"; (3) "Chinese-American Students: Who Are They?"; (4) "Academic and Language Characteristics of Chinese Students"; (5) "The Chinese Culture"; and (6) "Parents' Influence." Extensive statistical data appear in the report, as do a large number of quotations from reference sources. Taken together, the data portray Chinese immigrants to the United States, on the whole, as relatively well educated and supportive of education, highly paid, consisting of large families, often bilingual, and generally respectful of authority and tradition. Contains 71 references. (SG)

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# Chinese-American Students: A Review of the Literature

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# CHINESE-AMERICAN STUDENTS: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Shu Ya Zhang
Dr. Angela L. Carrasquillo
*Fordham University*

The literature reviewed in this article is divided into six main sections: (a) Asian Immigrants in United States: Demographic Data, (b) Economic and Educational Background of Asian Immigrants, (c) Chinese-American Students: Who Are They? (d) Academic and Language Characteristics of Chinese Students, (e) The Chinese Culture, (f) Parents Influence.

## Asian Immigrants in the United States: Demographic Data

Immigration from Asia and the Pacific Islands has been increasing steadily over the past four decades. The average yearly immigration from this area during the 1950s was only 13,300. This figure rose to about 31,900 in the 1960s, and to 134,100 during the 1970s. Between 1981 and 1989, it increased to 268,500. This phenomenal growth is likely to continue during the 1990s for several reasons. First, current immigration policy emphasizes family reunification. The growing number of Asian American currently in the United States means that there will be more individuals in Asian countries who will be eligible to apply for entry under the family reunification provision. Second, enactment of immigration legislation in 1990 increased the total number of immigrants who will be allowed to enter the United States each year, thus enabling a greater number of Asians to gain admission. And third, preference given to individuals who have work skills needed by American businesses should also promote immigration from Asia (O'Hare & Felt, 1991).

As a group, Asian Americans do not resemble other racial or ethnic minorities. Less well known is the fact that Asian Americans vary widely in their characteristics according to their cultural and linguistic origins. Asian Americans are increasingly likely to live in suburbs and new communities that have been established outside traditional ethnic neighborhoods. Asia is a vast region that contains over half the world's population, China alone has more than four times the U.S. population (Gardner, Robey, and Smith, 1989; McLeod, 1991).

Successive waves of immigrants have come to the United States from Asia for more than a century, beginning with the Chinese and Japanese (Gardner, Robey, and Smith, 1989). Once looked down upon as poorly educated, blue-collar "Orientals," Asian Americans are now often perceived as a "model minority." It is true that Asian

Americans as a whole are better educated, occupying higher rungs on the occupational ladder, and earning more than the general United States population, and even white Americans. But the broad averages mask great disparities; many recent arrivals, particularly immigrants from rural areas of China, come ill-equipped for new life in the United States and fare far less well than other Asians. The greatest wave of recent Asian immigration to the United States has been from South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos -- and it has not been "selective immigration"; these late arrivals were predominantly poor, illiterate "boat people" (Gardner, Robey, and Smith, 1989; O'Hare & Felt, 1991; Smith, & Billiter, 1985).

According to the 1990's census the Asian population increased by 79.5 percent in the 1980's, rising to 7.3 million from 3.5 million. That is seven times faster than the general population and "makes them far and away the most rapidly growing" ethnic group in the country (Smith, & Billiter, 1985). Liff (1991a) states that the heavy influx of immigrants has sharply altered the composition of the Asian population in the United States. Until 1970, two-thirds of all Asian-Americans were of Japanese or Chinese descent, and most were members of families that had been here since the late 19th or early 20th century. Most also lived in urban concentrations, like Chinatown in New York and San Francisco. One surprising finding was that Brooklyn's 1990 Asian-American poppulation of 111,251 eased past Manhattan's by 1,000 people to become the borough with the second largest Asian-American population in the city. Queens, by comparison, has more Asian-Americans than Brooklyn and Manhattan combined.

Immigration represented about 54% of the increase; the remainder represented children born to Asian parents in the United States. While Chinese-Americans are still the dominant Asian group in this country, they, too, have seen profound changes in the past 25 years (Barringer, 1991).

The flow of immigrants has changed the ethnic balance radically. Whereas in 1970, Japanese formed the largest group, in 1980 Chinese surpassed them, according to a report by Leon F. Bouvier for the Center of Migration Studies in New York. Bouvier estimated that in 1990 there were 1.4 million Filipinos, 1.26 million Chinese, 859,000 Vietnamese, 814,000 Koreans, 804,000 Japanese, 684,000 Asian-Indians and 706,000 others, including Cambodians, Laotians and Pacific Islanders (Butterfield, 1991).

Asian Americans flocked to California Bay Area's outlying counties during the 1980s, giving some suburbs the multicultural look previously associated only with San Francisco, 1990 census results show. The Asian American population doubled in California six Bay Area counties: San Mateo, Alameda, Solano, Sonoma, Contra Costa and Santa Clara. Bay Area Asians totalled 918,419, or more than one of every seven area residents (Schreiner, 1991).

New York remained an essentially segregated city in 1990, according to New York Newsday's preliminary neighborhood-by-neighborhood analysis of 1990 census data. Asian-Americans, who constitute the fastest-growing segment of the city's population, are now centered in Queens' community districts covering Elmhurst

and Flushing. For the first time, they comprise more than 10% of two Brooklyn community districts: Sunset Park and Bensonhurst. In Manhattan, Asian-Americans pushed out of their traditional Chinatown base into the neighboring Lower East Side, replacing Hispanics (Liff, 1991b). The New Asian immigrants have tended to cluster in towns or cities where a friend or relative first settled, following patterns of earlier waves of Irish, Italian, Polish and Jewish immigrants from Europe (Butterfield, 1991).

## Economic and Educational Background of Asian Immigrants

For all the talk of a "model minority" and the pictures drawn in the press of a single monolithic Asian American minority group, Gardner, el. al (1989) have found that Asian Americans are not homogeneous. Their demographic characteristics differ markedly: They have different age, fertility, and mortality patterns. Their family structures, employment patterns, occupations, incomes, and poverty levels are different. This is true among the different Asian American groups and within them as well. There are rich and poor Chinese, rich and poor Filipinos, rich and poor immigrants (Gardner, Robey, and Smith, 1989).

Economically and socially Asian Americans as a whole are faring well, but the popular notion of a highly successful "model minority" applies much more to some Asian American groups than to others. Adjustment problems can be severe and poverty is high among some of the most recent arrivals from Asia (Gardner, Robey, and Smith, 1989).

As widely reported in the press, the 1980 census revealed that median family income in 1979 for Asian Americans-- $23,600 for the six groups making up 95% of Asian Americans--exceeded that not only of American families in general ($19,900), but also the level reported by white families ($20,800). The white median was topped by the Japanese ($27,350), Asian Indians ($24,990), Filipinos ($23,690), and Chinese ($22,560), and barely trailed by Koreans ($20,460). Among the six major Asian groups, only the Vietnamese ($12,840) fell below the white and national medians.

These family statistics are misleading. Gardner, et al. (1989) pointed out that the Asian American edge has much to do with the way Asian American immigrants have mobilized living arrangements and higher labor force participation to produce more workers per household. In 1980, 63% of family households headed by an Asian American contained two workers or more, and 17% had at least three. The census statistics on incomes per worker show that not all Asian American groups enjoy relatively high incomes. Moreover, within each of the Asian American groups, the foreign born and particularly the latest immigrants have relatively low incomes. Poverty was relatively high for the most recently arrived immigrant families, reflecting the problems some Asian immigrants have in finding work when they first arrive (Gardner, Robey, and Smith, 1989).

Recent immigrants of Asian origin are making the economic adjustment to life in the United States in part by depending on strong family support. As historian David Bell puts it: "All the various explanations of the Asian Americans' success tend to fall into one category: self-sufficiency. The first element of this self- sufficiency is family." The stability of the family among Asian Americans, he says, "contributes to success in at least three ways. First, it provides a secure environment for children. Second, it pushes those children to do better than their parents.... And, finally, it is a significant financial advantage." (Gardner, Robey, and Smith, 1989).

There may be another reason why the Asian-American population is not as well-off as their high family income would indicate. Asian Americans tend to have larger-than-average families. When we take family size into account by measuring per-capita income, Asian Americans have lower, not higher, incomes than non-Hispanic whites. The per-capita income of the Asian population in 1989 was $14,000, compared with $14,900 for whites (O'Hare & Felt, 1991).

The stability of Asian American families is reflected in the 1980 census data on the proportion of households headed by females and the proportion of children living with two parents. Also, a greater share of the children in each Asian American group lives with two parents than is true for Hispanics, blacks, or even whites (O'Hare & Felt, 1991). The share is below that of the white population, 83%, only among Vietnamese, 74%. For Asian Indians, the share is almost twice that of the black population, 93% compared to 45%. 89% of Korean children, 88% of Chinese children, and 87% of Japanese children live with two parents.

Several theories have been offered to explain Asian-American income trends in the 1980s. One theory suggests that a process of economic polarization, which characterized U.S. income patterns in general during the past decade, is occurring in the Asian community as well: a case of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. In addition, conventional immigration theory suggests that, upon arrival in the United States, new immigrants often swell the ranks of the poor, but more established immigrants and their offspring begin to move up the socioeconomic ladder. The flood of new Asian immigrants during the 1980s may have increased the poverty rate, but many of the second- and third-generation Asian immigrants may be moving into the middle and upper-middle class. Indeed, both processes may be working at the same time.

Furthermore, recent immigration patterns have brought two very distinct groups of Asians to the United States. One group is educated, and ready to move into the mainstream quickly, but the other lacks the necessary education, and skills to move out of poverty (O'Hare & Felt, 1991).

Much public attention has been given to the academic accomplishments of Asian-American students, some of whom have only been in the country a short time and only recently mastered English. Most Asian cultures place a heavy emphasis on education and hard work, and young people are expected to pursue educational opportunities. They spend more time on their homework, a

researcher at the United States Department of Education found, take more advanced high school courses, and graduate with more credits than other American students. A higher percentage of these young people complete high school and finish college than do white American students. Trying to explain why so many Asian-American students are superachievers, Harvard Psychology Professor Jerome Kagan comes up with this simple answer: "To put it plainly, they work harder" (Brand, 1987; O'Hare & Felt, 1991).

A few statistics indicate just how well many Asians are doing academically, especially in math and science. While Asians make up just 2.1% of the United States population, last fall's freshman class at Harvard was 14% Asian American; at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 20%; and at the University of California Berkeley, 25%.

Of the 70 students who have won scholarships in the Westinghouse Science Talent Search since 1981, 20 have been of Asian descent. In 1986, Asians won all five top scholarship awards from Westinghouse (Fischer, 1988).

Asians' commitment to education should continue to boost their job status and income levels. Rising educational levels in the general population are associated with rising incomes and higher job status. And as the children of today's Asian American immigrants move through the educational system, the assimilation process should work to impart those values and views that are distinctly American. Thus, their children in turn will be less Asian than American (Gardner, Robey and Smith, 1989).

## Chinese-American Students: Who Are They?

Trade between China and Western countries was initiated during the reign of the Han emperor, Wu Ti (140-87 B.C.). Chinese merchants during the period traded via Sinkiang and Tibet with Central Asia and parts of Eastern Europe. From the time of these early encounters, for more than two thousand years, many Chinese have continued to leave their homeland by both land and sea in order to better their lives in foreign lands. According to the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission, some 21,460,000 Chinese were living in 115 different foreign localities in 1975 (Yao, 1978).

In the early period of migration to overseas countries, most Chinese were laborers (coolies) and intended someday to return to their place of birth after earning enough for retirement. They were called sojourners. However, as a result of changing international relations, the number of sojourners has been decreasing since World War II. On the contrary, more and more educated Chinese have permanently migrated to foreign nations for freedom, for education, and for economic gain. Very few returned to their homeland for retirement (Yao, 1978).

Nearly 23% of Asian-Americans are of Chinese heritage. Based on the 1990 Census figures, there are 40,000 Chinese immigrants from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong annually (Butterfield, 1991).

The current boom in Chinese immigration began when discriminatory quota systems were ended in 1965 (Stocker & Staff, 1988). The existence of Long-Standing Chinese communities, particularly in San Francisco and other parts of the Bay Area, has been a major draw for people from the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, and the Republic of China on Taiwan (McLeod, 1991).

In regard to educational level, 90% of Chinese men complete high school among both the older and the younger groups aged 25-29 in 1980, compared to the white figure of 87%. The rate of enrollment for the group, ages 16 and 17, 96% of Chinese American boys compare to 89% of the white population. 24% of whites aged 20-24 were enrolled in college in 1980, but the proportions were 60% for Chinese (Gardner, Robey, and Smith, 1989). The mean years of school completed among Chinese Americans was 12.4. Compared with other Oriental Americans, Chinese Americans have the highest educational level. This trend has been on the rise since 1970 owning to the further reinforcement of brain-drain age by the United States. This phenomenon is attributed to the fact that an influx of Chinese students who came to the United States for higher education decided to settle permanently. The professions and related services such as medicine, law, education, and engineering have moved away from the kinds of jobs held by their predecessors who arrived in this country in the 19th century (Yao, 1978, 1983).

Doris Chu (a Harvard-educated art historian) said that in the past, the Chinese who left to go to the United States were at the bottom level of society, people with no education and no prospects. Immigration was, therefore, an act of desperation. The journey was long, hard and extremely dangerous during the 19th century. Would-be immigrants were frequently kidnapped, and sold into slavery. Rather than seeking new roots in a new world, the young adventurers almost always left their families behind in their native villages with the promise to return after their fortunes had been made (Stocker, 1988). Another reason for slow immigration is that the Chinese who did make it to America confronted discrimination so virulent that it prevented most from getting a foothold on the American success ladder, according to Chu (1987). The roadblock of racism was institutionalized by the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act that banned Chinese working-class men from entering the country. Other restrictive federal laws followed until 1965 when immigration-law changes finally put Chinese and other Asians on equal footing with Europeans.

Since then, many foreign students who have been drawn to local universities, (Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Wellesley) have chosen to remain in the United States after graduation (Stocker, 1988).

The first of these groups were students from China who were confined to the United States after the Communist triumph there in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. There have been the brain-drain groups of engineers, doctors and scientists from Taiwan, South Korea, and the Philippines who found better jobs in America than at home. I.M. Pei, the architect, An Wang, the computer-company pioneer, and Samuel C. C. Ting, the Nobel laureate

in physics, are all members of migration.

"If you could get the grades for kids from Chinatown before World War II, they wouldn't be in the same league," Professor Vogel contended. Their forebears, often illiterate laborers who came to the United States to work on the railroads, represented a very different segment of Chinese society (Butterfield, 1986). Ezra Vogel, a Harvard sociologist who has written extensively on both Communist China, and the reasons behind Japan's economic success, suggests that the current group of Asian immigrants, whose offspring are doing so well in American schools, "are a very biased sample, the cream of their own societies" (Butterfield, 1986).

That Asian-Americans have replaced Jews as the predominant group in academically demanding institutions such as Lowell High School is not a coincidence, many educators believe. Much the same thing has happened in New York City, in schools like Stuyvesant High School, one of the city's three elite schools that require an examination for admission and that emphasize science and math. About 36% of the 2,600 students at Stuyvesant are now Asian-American, according to Murray Kahn, the assistant principal. "The Asian-Americans are very similar to the Jewish immigrants of the 1930s and 40s," Mr. Kahn said, "with their emphasis on learning and the family and the sheer energy they get from their new opportunity in America (Butterfield, 1986).

Some educators, including Elaine Kim of UC Berkeley's Asian studies program, say a major reason why so many Asian students are bright is "selective immigration" by the United States over the years. Kim and some others argue that U.S. immigration policy has culled out the bright, professional adults from Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, and other Asian countries. Their children, Kim said, are naturally going to be upwardly mobile in school (Smith & Billiter, 1985).

But the greatest wave of recent Asian immigration to the United States has been from South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos -- and it has not been selective. More than 730,000 Southeast Asia refugees came to the United States several years after the fall of Saigon in 1975. These late arrivals were predominantly poor, illiterate "boat people" who fled after the Communist takeover (Smith & Billiter, 1985).

All Chinese immigrants come to America for a common purpose, that is, to find a better way to make their living and intend to make America their permanent home, unlike the Chinese who came in the 1800s as sojourners. To understand Chinese-American children, it is important to realize that the Chinese-American culture is different from the cultures of Chinese from China or Taiwan, even though the Chinese culture can be traced across more than three thousand years of history, philosophy, and literature. It is also important to note that the Chinese-American community is heterogeneous. Families, for example, range from sixth-generation acculturated Americans to the most recent immigrants. They came from different parts of China or Taiwan and they are of widely different ages and educational backgrounds (Chang, 1973).

Acdemic and Language Characteristics of Chinese Students

The Asian students represent a multitude of ethnic peoples. Approximately one-fifth (17%) are Chinese. Almost three-fourths of the Asian student population come from bilingual families. Asian Language Minority (LM) students with a high socioeconomic (SES) background are more likely to have a higher English proficiency than those from a low socioeconomic (SES) background (Bradby, Owings and Quinn, 1991).

"The model minority myth, combined with cultural forces and society's preconceived notions of Asian students, influence them to excel in the quantitative areas," said Judy Jackson Pitts, associate dean for student affairs and director of the office of minority education at MIT. For 60% of Asian-American students, English is a second language, according to a 1989 study by the American Educational Research Association based in Washington. They are among first-generation and children of first-generation Asian-Americans who have generally shown above-average quantitative skills but have great difficulty in speaking and writing English. At University of Massachusetts-Boston, 21.8% of Asian-Americans never pass the writing Proficiency exam - an essay test required to graduate - no matter how many times they take it. They subsequently drop out and/or transfer to another university that does not require the test (Parmley, 1990).

As a strategy to overcome their language difficulties, Asian-American students concentrate in fields that optimize their affinity for numbers and equations, which include engineering, computer science, mathematics and the physical sciences, like chemistry and physics. They avoid majoring in the arts and humanities - areas that weigh heavily on verbal and writing skills. At MIT, for example, nine out of every 10 students are science or engineering majors. This fall, Asian-Americans constitute 24% of the incoming freshman class - up from last year's 19.3%, according to the admissions office.

They major in the technical fields where language is less of a barrier - where they don't have to deal with essays, term papers and class discussions. They are not necessarily interested in these fields, but for them, going into such areas of study becomes a survival strategy - a way to get through school (Parmley, 1990). Attleboro Mayor Kai Ong Shang, 65, the state's only Chinese-American mayor and the highest-ranking public official of Chinese-American descent in the Northeast, wishes more Asian-Americans will get involved in politics. "They come here as immigrants and receive services from the state, such as an educational system," said Shang, who is in his third term as mayor. "But the majority go into the technical fields and once they establish themselves, they don't participate in the political process which would allow them to advocate for new programs that will benefit their communities and the next generation" (Parmley, 1990).

Coupled with this strategy by Asian-Americans, is the

pragmatic view - often encouraged by their parents - that study in the technical fields will provide marketable skills and entry to secure, high-status, well-paying jobs. Kiang, a second-generation Chinese-American, graduated from Harvard in 1980 with bachelor's degrees in geological sciences and in visual and environmental studies. While at Harvard, he said he thought he was destined to become like his father - a neurophysiologist and a professor at MIT and at the Harvard Medical School. "Their parents feel there will be less chance of discrimination in the technical fields because the criterion used to judge performance is objective - an equation is either right or wrong," Kiang said, "whereas, with the liberal arts, judgment is more subjective, and can be skewed. They don't want to see their kid get hurt because of their ethnicity" (Parmley, 1990).

Suzanna Kang, a 17-year-old Korean American student at T.C.1. Williams High School in Alexandra, Va., fits most Americans' stereotype of Asian American students. She is bright and hard-working, carries nearly a 4.0 grade point average, especially likes science and math, is headed for a good college or university (most likely on a scholarship). She says."I guess I do fit the Asian American superachiever image, but I know there are many Asian American kids who are not doing as well, especially those who have recently immigrated to this country, kids who are struggling to learn English" (Fischer, 1988).

Last year, the NEA Study Committee on Asian/Pacific Islander Concerns drew the same conclusion, noting that "the image of Asian and Pacific Islanders as a relatively trouble-free minority" of model students is not realistic, nor does it "do justice to those students who are struggling to get a public school education in what for some of them is still a new and alien culture."

The media have helped to perpetuate Americans' stereotypical view of most Asian kids as supersmart and wildly successful, coming from stable homes with parents who encourage educational achievement. In the past year or so, Scientific American, Time, USA Today, and The New York Times have all featured superachieving Asian American kids in major feature stories (Fischer, 1988).

"Junior and senior high students who have come here in recent years are having the most difficult time adjusting," points out Jean Takeshita, a multicultural resource teacher with the St. Paul school system's Multicultural Center. "The young children seem to get along very well. Even those who may start out having a hard time with English catch up quickly" (Fischer, 1988). The whiz-kid image fits many of the children of Asian immigrant families who arrived in this country in the late 1960s and early 1970s, following passage of 1965 law liberalizing immigrant quotas. Most of these immigrants came from Hong Kong, South Korea, India, and the Philippines. And the image fits many children of the more than 100,000 Indochinese (primarily Vietnamese) immigrants who arrived in this country following the end of the Vietnam War in 1975.

Both these groups included mostly middle- to upper-income professional people who were fairly well-educated and who passed on to their children an abiding interest in education and a strong

work ethic.

Asian scholars also argue that the "model minority" myth obscures such problems as crime, high suicide rates, mental disorders and disintegration of families among poor refugees and immigrants unable to cope with a strange, new society. Some experts are even worried about public fascination with Asian whiz kids. "They may also be slide-rule nerds who can count anything but don't know how to survive in a social setting," scoffs one ethnic-Chinese academic (McBee, 1984)

Although, like most minorities, Asians lag behind whites in SAT verbal skills, they clearly stand out in science. Last year, when the Westinghouse Science Talent Search named its top achievers from nearly 1,000 entrants, Asians swept 6 of the top 10 awards. This year (1984), they accounted for 9 of the 40 semifinalists and 3 of the 10 winners.

What drives these students? Experts trace the push to succeed academically to culture, social background and, especially, family pressures (McBee, 1984).

## The Chinese Culture

Knowledge of one's culture does not occur in a vacuum; it is transmitted through the family. Children often acquire a sense of their heritage as a result of deliberate and concentrated parental effort in the context of family life. This inculcation of values from one generation to another is a universal feature of the conservation of culture (Caplan, Choy, and Whitmore, 1992).

In ethnic minority research, one of the most remarkable phenomena has been the high educational achievements demonstrated by some Asian-American groups over the last four decades. Although Asian Americans have been subjected to similar prejudice and discriminatory practices encountered by other ethnic minority groups, their educational attainments have been increasing. There are two major explanations that have been proposed for the achievements of Asian Americans, involving possible hereditary or culturally advantages. The other major explanation for the achievements of Asian Americans is cultural in nature. Cultural institutions, such as schools, may affect learning and performance. For example, in their extensive observations in the three societies, Stevenson, Lee, and Stigler (1986) found that U.S. schools spent less time on academic activities, U.S. teachers imparted less information, and there was less emphasis on homework in U.S. than in Chinese or Japanese schools (Sue & Okazaki,1990).

The most popular cultural view is that Asian family values and socialization experiences emphasize the need to succeed educationally. Largely on the basis of anecdotal and observational evidence rather than on empirical findings, investigators have identified the following values or practices in Asian families that may promote educational achievements: demands and expectations for achievement and upward mobility, induction of guilt about parental

sacrifices and the need to fulfill obligations, respect for education, social comparisons with other Asian-American families in terms of educational success, and obedience to elders such as teachers. From structured interviews with Asian-American students, Mordkowitz and Ginsburg (1986) provided anecdotal support for a cultural interpretation involving family socialization for high achievements. The students reported that their families emphasized educational accomplishments, held high expectations for achievements, controlled the behaviors of the students, and considered schooling very important (Sue & Okazaki, 1990).

The Chinese-American students have been socialized with respect and reverence for authority and tradition as well as a philosophy of classic realism which emphasizes non-changing society, versus the values of western industrialized society. In public schools, American Chinese children and youth face conflicts between two divergent cultures: the culture they acquire at home, and the culture they acquire at school from teachers, principals, and fellow students with whom they are in daily contact. Teachers need to be aware of the students' cultural background and customs, which are different from those of the dominant society (Chang, 1973).

Children's academic achievement is given a more central role in some cultures than in others. The greater the cultural emphasis on effort, the more likely it is that parents and teachers will believe that they can be instrumental in aiding children in their academic achievement. This belief is transmitted to children, and they, too, come to believe that diligence will lead to success (Stevenson & Lee, 1990)

One of the most pervasive beliefs in Asian cultures is that in an effort as the major avenue for improvement and accomplishment. The malleability of human behavior has long been emphasized in Chinese writings and is one of the fundamental precepts of Confucianism. A typical example of this view is found in the writings of the Chinese philosopher Hsun Tzu, who wrote, "Achievement consists of never giving up....If there is no dark and dogged will, there will be no brilliant achievement" (Watson, 1967, P. 18).

No matter where Chinese people go or settle down they maintain close ties with their relatives and community. Many of the students have their grandparents or other relatives who still live in Chinatown. Students who now reside outside Chinatown, may have lived there when they were younger or have parents who were brought up there, many families moved to the other parts of the city as the family's economic position improved and because there is a shortage of housing in Chinatown. Many bilingual Chinese-Americans have returned to the Chinatown community to work in the agencies that help the recent immigrants and to become involved in the community's many problems (Chang, 1973). As Kluckhohn (1961) indicated, relational orientations in a family can be classified into three dimensions: 1) the individualistic orientation, 2) the collateral orientation, and 3) the lineal orientation. Using this distinction, the Chinese family is characterized by a lineal

orientation in which there exists a highly developed historical consciousness. The Chinese inherently believe that they should look after their parents and elder persons. They not only take care of their ancestors graves, but also obey wishes of deceased parents. In addition, there is a very close association with extended families. All these are expected to continue from one generation to the next.

In the past, the Chinese culture pressured the young to conform. It emphasized honor and respect for the elderly. Reversal of such priorities in American culture is trying enough for the older generation. Now immigrant realities have increased tensions. Many old men in Chinatown who have worked their lives away for distant families now cannot afford to bring them to the United States, and they are cruelly lonely. But they may be the lucky ones. Others have brought over sons, wives, parents, grandchildren, brothers, or sisters, only to face opprobrium. Men who slaved to send $100 a month to the Orient were in fact supporting their far off families in considerable comfort, by Hong Kong standards. The new arrivals have been shattered to discover how little $100 is in America, and that getting it takes work. They are further demoralized to discover the low status of a parent who may be a laundry worker or cook. No one wants new bars to the reunion of these families. But there is need of better advanced preparation, particularly since today's Chinese arrivals, unlike their forefathers, come determined to be Americans. Young people have been particular victims of this lack of preparation. The chance American offers the young for free education and economic advance usually motivates a family's move to America; but it is a parental aspiration, not the children's own. For little children, adjustment will come. For teenagers, it is hard. Most of these young Chinese came here unwillingly, torn from groups in Hong Kong with which they felt identity, and plunged at the sensitive and lonely period of adolescence into an alien land whose strange language forces successive failures in the classroom. The Chinese culture emphasizes tradition, conformity, respect for authority, submergence of individuality, and intolerance of ambiguity. Chinese value family loyalty and unity (Kitano, 1980).

Outsiders are distrusted and there is little concern for the social welfare of those outside the family constellation. The Chinese family constellation has traditionally been structured on the extended family model. The agrarian, rural nature of China necessitated large families in order to survive. In spite of the Cultural Revolution, the Maoist ideology that emphasizes the needs of the society seems to continue to take precedence over the needs of the individual (Gentry, 1981).

The Chinese student also seeks conformity, obedience, and group dependence. Perseverance and attention to task is essential in the development of the Chinese student. In light of the Chinese cultural characteristics, the behaviors to be fostered are sharing, helpfulness, friendliness, cooperation, uniformity and self-control. Appropriate behaviors such as self-control and conformity are to be expected. Just as punishment is to be conducted

privately in order to save "face," recognition and reward of individual performance is to be avoided. The Chinese student also has a highly reflective response style that requires additional "wait-time" in order to respond to the particular question (Pikcunas, 1986).

Asian children tend to be field-dependent learners (Garfinkel, & Sharyl, 1982; Peterson, 1983). They need reinforcement from teachers and they work efficiently in a well-structured, quiet learning environment in which definite goals have been established for them. They seldom reveal their opinions or their abilities voluntarily or dare to challenge their instructors. Even when they know the answer to the teacher's question, they may not respond by raising their hand, choosing instead to sit quietly as though lost (Yao, 1985).

Older children, who are accustomed to structured and passive learning conditions, rather than to the American educational approach, which requires critical and divergent thinking, may perform well in rote memorization and mathematics operations but may do poorly in creative writing and analytical commentary. Immigrant Asian children are inclined to seek the teacher's approval and to make decisions based on the teacher's choice or favoritism, thus becoming more dependent than other children on their teachers for help with schoolwork and guidance in classroom behavior (Peterson, 1983; West, 1983).

In some cultures, such as that in the United States, the individual is deemed to be responsible for his or her accomplishments and difficulties; in others, such as the Chinese and Japanese cultures, members of the family, teachers, or a larger group--such as pupils in the same classroom--are expected to assume some of the responsibility. As the interdependence among individuals increases, their mutual obligations to each other also increase. Individuals in such situations work hard not only to satisfy their own goals but also to meet the goals set by their families and teachers, and the success of the group is valued as highly as the success of particular individuals within the group (Stevenson & Lee, 1990).

The greater the cultural emphasis on effort, the more likely it is that parents and teachers will believe that they can be instrumental in aiding children in their academic achievement. This belief is transmitted to children, and they, too, come to believe that diligence will lead to success. If, however, adults believe that innate ability imposes critical limitations on children's progress in school, it seems unlikely that they would be motivated to make such strong efforts at assistance. Japan and Taiwan, like other countries influenced by the Confucian belief in human malleability, are among the cultures that place great weight on the possibility of advancement through effort (Stevenson & Lee, 1990). Suzuki (1977) has also taken issue, in the case of Chinese and Japanese Americans, with a cultural interpretation of their success. Although acknowledging that respect for education is a cultural value among these two groups, he also advanced the proposition that Asian Americans came to pursue education because

of their status as a minority group.

The basic difference in the relationship between parents and children in Chinese and American families is that Chinese ask what children should do for their parents and Americans ask what parents should do for their children (Hsu, 1981).

Traditionally, in China, parents have the freedom to decide their children's future. For instance, infanticide was seldom punished by the law. The communication was absolutely limited to one direction from parents to children. The feedback from children was only one way, i.e., to fulfill what the parents wished regardless of whether it was reasonable or not. The children (especially the son) not only had to follow sayings like "Parents are always right" and "Filial piety is the most important of all virtues," but they also had to satisfy their parents' wishes and to protect their parents' safety at all times and in all circumstances (Chen, 1988).

Dornbusch et al. (1987) have found that Asian-American achievement levels tend to be inversely related to the number of generations in the United States, apparently supporting a cultural interpretation (i.e., decreased maintenance of Asian cultural values results in lower academic grades). With increased acculturation, it has been assumed that Asian values of hard work, discipline, and respect for education have eroded. However, an inverse relation between acculturation to American values, and academic achievements is not incompatible with relative functionalism. Increased acculturation also results in more avenues for mobility. Sue & Zane (1985) found that recent Chinese immigrants were significantly more likely than were acculturated Chinese to agree with the statement that their choices of academic majors were influenced by their English skills. These students had low English proficiency, averaging in the 18th percentile on the verbal portion of the Scholastic Aptitude Test. They confined their selection of majors to fields requiring quantitative skills (e.g., mathematics and computer sciences) rather those requiring more sophisticated English proficiency (e.g., social sciences and humanities). Increased English proficiency is likely to be related to knowledge of American society, and ways of getting ahead, which may ultimately decrease the relative value of education as a means of mobility. In addition, it is highly likely that the recent immigrants perceive career limitations and, therefore, avoid those fields such as the social sciences and humanities, in which English facility and interpersonal skills specific to American society are needed. Mathematics and sciences are more likely to emphasize technical competence. There is evidence from various sources that many Asian Americans perceive limitations in their career choices or upward mobility because of English language skills or social discrimination (Sue, Sue, Zane, and Wong, 1985).

## Parents' Influence

Smethurst (1975) suggests that for all children, home may be

a good place to begin the highly individual process of learning to read. He also states that children who have already made some sort of beginning at home seem to do at least as well- or better-in first-grade (and later) reading as classmates who have begun first grade without such a head start. Contrary to popular opinion, learning to read does not begin in school. Learning to read begins at home (Binkley, 1988). Children begin learning to read at an early age, when parents first use words and images to describe and interpret their world. Just as children naturally learned to talk by following examples, children may naturally learn a great deal about reading before they set foot inside a school building (Binkley, 1988). Reading and writing can develop in the same natural way as spoken language, provided that the conditions for learning are similar. These conditions include a stimulating environment, encouragement, and a relaxed adult attitude (Cohn, 1981).

Learning to read naturally starts when parents read to their young children and let them handle books (Holdaway, 1979). Children learn the language and the conventions of print. They learn that the language of books can be as meaningful as the oral language of their daily lives, and it soon becomes apparent that their own language can be written down to communicate meaningful things to others (Cohn, 1981).

Unquestionably the most efficient learning environments we know are those centered on the conditions of the healthy home (Holdaway, 1984). The contribution of the people in the children's environment is extremely important (Wells, 1987). Parents play a critical role in the literacy development of their children. In Becoming a Nation of Readers the Commission on Reading (1985) concluded that "Parents play roles of inestimable importance in laying the foundation for learning to read", and "Parents have an obligation to support their children's continued growth as readers" (p. 53).

Guiding principles and practices for parent involvement have been identified. One precious gift parents can give their children is regular daily time (Rasinski & Frederichs 1988). As little as 20 minutes of child-parent reading interaction each evening can help children begin a lifelong reading habit. The value of daily activities such as read-aloud is significant (Rasinski & Fredericks, 1988). Bedtime stories are an excellent experience example of how parents naturally use this principle. Reading activities for children and parents must be purposeful; the reasons for an activity should relate directly to the child's immediate life and interests (Rasinski & Fredericks, 1988).

A foundation for literacy is built up in children who are surrounded by capable, attentive, and loving adults. Such people provide children with the security they will need for optimal learning. By reading to, and speaking with the children, parents help them, to learn about both oral and written language. In providing the children with a wealth of developmentally appropriate experiences, they provide valuable background knowledge necessary for future reading comprehension (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982).

The very best parent-child activities are those that allow parents to support their children's endeavors (Rasinski & Fredericks, 1988). Parents need to make reading easy. Parents can offer support by providing sufficient background activities, giving explanations, answering questions, and sharing examples. In a sense, they act to scaffold, to support their children's language literacy growth (Wells, 1987). Love of literacy is promoted when children are encouraged and helped to overcome seeming obstacles (Rasinski & Fredericks, 1988). Informal activities create an environment that encourages children to take risks and to be creative. Spontaneity is also a prime consideration for parents as they work with their children. Opportunities to become involved in literacy abound within the everyday, informal family context. Research indicates that interaction is also important in the success of parent-child literacy efforts. Parents and children should share in the responsibility for learning to read and write. Parents should encourage their children to ask questions and to answer them. Greater interaction tends to reduce the formality of a task (Rasinski & Fredericks, 1988).

There have also been many studies which deal with environmental factors associated with early readers. One factor is an availability and range of printed materials in the environment (Teale, 1978). This availability enabled the children to use and get used to written messages. Availability is not determined merely by the number of books owned by the family; nor was the range of printed materials confined only to books (Teale, 1987).

Another factor in the studies of young readers is that reading is "done" in the environment . Children must learn what function print in the environment serves. Children must initially learn that the print in the environment is meaningful (Teale, 1978). Understanding the function of written language is facilitated with a variety of printed materials. Smith (1970) also implies that reading "environmental print" is the basic way by which children come to realize the function of written language (Teals, 1987).

Of all the facts of the environment mentioned in the studies of early reading, reading to children is probably the most cited. It was also found that one or both of the parents were readers themselves. The parents acted as models for reading behavior, and the children attempted to emulate such a model (Teale, 1978). The environment plays a generally important role. The environment is a contributing factor in the development of reading ability in children (Teale, 1978). The more conductive to learning to read we can make the environment, the more responsive it is for children to learn naturally. Yao, (1981) states that the parent-child relationship has been changed as a result of Western influence; children are more vocal, express their opinions more freely, and are more independent, like their American counterparts. Parents assert their authority less as they adopt American methods of child rearing. He found that Chinese-American parents were much more permissive in child rearing than Americans have perceived them to be. Yao, (1983) also pointed out that immigrant children can adapt to an English-speaking environment much faster than their parents.

When English becomes a child's primary conversational language, parents have difficulty communicating with them in their native tongue. The bilingual proficiency of parents and children differs because their primary languages are not the same. Subsequently, poor communication between parents and their children frequently leads to learning and behavioral problems in schools.

Most immigrant Asian parents have high expectations of their children's performance in school. They still value education highly and believe that a good education will eventually offer a good living; thus, they put immense pressure on their children to strive for academic excellence (Kim, 1978; Yao, 1979a, 1979b). The belief that people can always be improved by proper effort and instruction is a basic tenet of Confucianism. This philosophy, propounded by the Chinese sage in the fifth century B.C., in time became a dynamic force not only in China but also in Korea, Japan and Vietnam, sanctifying the family and glorifying education. In the view of William Liu, a sociologist who directs the Pacific-Asian American Mental Health Research Center at the University of Illinois in Chicago, the Confucian ethic remains the strongest determinant of behavior by Asian-Americans. "In the Confucian ethic," he said, "there is a centripetal family orientation that makes people work for the honor of the family, not for themselves. In Confucianism, one can never repay one's mother and father, and there is a strong sense of guilt. It is very compelling, like the Protestant ethic in the West, a great inducer of motivation" (Butterfield, 1986).

Butterfield (1986), shows us a classic example of these values is Katherine Chen, who graduated in June at the top of her class from Lowell High School in San Francisco. The school has been the city's most prominent public school, with admission based on a combination of gradepoint average and competitive exams. Now 65% of the students in this school are Asian Americans and almost 60% of the students are female.

Miss Chen, who plans to enroll in Stanford in the fall and eventually to become a doctor, was a straight-A student at Lowell. "In the Chinese family," she said, "education is very important because parents see it as the way to achieve. With that environment, it's natural to study. My friends are that way, too. It is not a chore. They know the benefits." Miss Chen regularly did four hours of homework every night in high school. She did watch some television after dinner, she said, "because my mom makes it a point that I relax." But Katherine, in common with many Asian-American students, does not date. The preoccupation of American teenagers with the opposite sex is seen as dangerous and distracting by many Asian parents accustomed to a more traditional society where children grow up more slowly.

The former United States Education Secretary William J. Bennett said that a key reason for the Asian students' educational success is "the existence of extraordinarily close ties between parents and children and the willingness of parents to sacrifice for the sake of their children's education". He also cited a general cultural trait of Asians: "a deep respect for learning."

And Asians themselves, while often hesitant either as groups or individuals to boast about their educational achievements, agree that culturally education is very important to them (Smith & Billiter, 1985).

In Confucian thought, teachers rank above fathers and below only the king in the social hierarchy, said Vy Trac Do, a student counselor at Fullerton College and the author of several books and a tape series on Vietnamese culture. "People in Vietnam, China, Japan or Korea say, 'You can be poor, but if you are educated, I'll respect you,' " said Vy (Smith & Billiter, 1985).

Asian parents are more willing than other ethnic groups to sacrifice for their children's education, sometimes working 12 hours a day to save money for college. Eight of the nine Asian parents interviewed said without hesitation they would sell their only house if necessary to send their children to college, according to the study of a model for academic success: the school and home environment of East Asian students by Barbara Schnieder, and Yongsook Lee (1990). Only one of five Anglo parents said they would sell their home. Lee, (1984), Schneider, and Lee, (1990) also found out that East Asian parents have higher educational expectations and standards for their children than do Anglo parents. Some explanations for these differences can be traced to: (1) the East Asian cultural tradition which places a high value on education for self-improvement, self-esteem, and family honor, and (2) the determination by some East Asian families to overcome occupational discrimination by investing in education. East Asian parents tended to have clearer and higher educational expectations for their children than Anglo parents. Interviews showed that 67% (18 out of 27) of the Anglo parents compared to 100% of the East Asian parents stated that "C" or "satisfactory" grades were not acceptable. A common belief among East Asian parents was the "if a person studied hard, he should not get a 'C'," whereas Anglo parents expressed the view that "I cannot complain too much about Cs because it is average." The study also found that Asian-American parents spell out their expectations of specific careers for their children, while white parents usually let children know they can decide their own future.

Although East Asians do succeed in school, their accomplishments are achieved at certain costs. One of the major findings of their study is that East Asian students spend much of their time studying rather than playing with their friends or participating in organized group activities. Consequently, they have less opportunity to develop social skills. Because of occupational discrimination against Asians, East Asian parents have encouraged their children to pursue medical and technical professions, which are relatively less language based than other kinds of high-level professions (Schneider, & Lee, 1990). Moreover, family expectations are highest among first-generation Asian immigrants, researchers find. Second-generation Asian-Americans may have higher educational achievement than those of the third generation, who have been more assimilated into the mainstream culture (Smith & Billiter, 1985).

In many studies, research shows that student achievement is directly related to the academic expectation of their families. Research findings consistently show that Chinese-American parenting practices differ, on average, from those of other cultural groups in the United States. The extent to which cultural groups in the United States adhere to traditional values in parenting practices varies according to the length of the family's stay in the United States and the degree of assimilation of the family into the dominant culture. Chinese parents, Siu (1972) summarizes, "tend to exercise more control over the members of the family, be more protective of children, emphasize more obedience to the parents, provide a higher proportion of enthusiastic positive feedback when teaching young children, value grades more than general cognitive achievement in children, evaluate more realistically a child's academic and personality characteristics, be less satisfied with a child's accomplishment, hold children to higher standards, and believe more in effort and less in innate ability than their American counterparts" (Davies, Burch, & Johnson, 1992; Epstein, 1992).

Siu (1972) identifies three issues about which the Chinese-American educational experience generates important questions about the education of all minorities: the importance of effort vs. innate ability for children's success in school, motivation to succeed in school, and types of parent involvement in the school. The Chinese family culture emphasizes effort over innate ability as the key to educational achievement--an affirmation that, indeed, all children can learn. Motivation to learn, however, will vary among minority groups and even within minority groups depending on their sociopolitical experiences and value contexts. Finally, the common assumption is that active parent involvement in the school is vital to children's educational achievement, but the Chinese-American experience shows that parents do not have to be actively involved at the school building or participate in policy making in order to care deeply about their children's education and do a great deal encourage and monitor their children's progress at home (Davies, Burch, and Johnson, 1992; Epstein, 1992).

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